United Nations E/2016/NGO/45

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
24 May 2016

Original: English

2016 session
24 July 2015-27 July 2016
Agenda item 5
High-level segment

Statement submitted by Legião da Boa Vontade, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is being issued without formal editing.

Please recycle

Statement

How to implement the new global sustainable development agenda and transform the agreed international commitments into effective outcomes? We would like to contribute to the answer by sharing our best practices and presenting the proposals gathered during the 12th Legião da Boa Vontade's Solidary Society Network Multi-stakeholder Forum, held in São Paulo (Brazil). We are a 66-year-old organization with more than 90 permanent education and social assistance centers across seven countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay, Portugal, the United States, and Uruguay). In 2015, we provided more than 12.5 million acts of service to benefit people living in poverty.

The Forum, which was broadcast via national TV and radio stations, was supported by the NGO Branch of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN/DESA) and brought together prominent Brazilian policy specialists, representatives of civil society organizations, networks, the private sector and academia. The resulting recommendations are presented in three main topics: (1) strengthening local actors; (2) fostering civil society engagement; and above all, (3) strengthening education for a Planetary Citizenship.

We particularly emphasize the third topic because when education does not embrace the values of this new agenda, we face the risk of contributing to the perpetuation of social and environmental injustice and inequality. The Brazilian educator José de Paiva Netto has advocated since the 1960s that Charity/Solidarity is a value that is pivotal for ensuring sustainable standards of living, "an essential tool for adjusting the mechanisms of society, which is still today governed by individualism, whether in the private or collective sphere. As a matter of fact, this has led people to indifference, to a dryness of the soul, that is, the absence of Solidarity, Fraternity, and Generosity in human and social relationships. ... Charity, allied with Justice, is the fuel to profound transformation. Its action is subtle, but effective."

Strengthening local actors

When analysing a country's indicators, national averages may mask great internal inequalities, and that urges the disaggregation of global statistics and data. This measure should be followed by mechanisms that decentralize public policy implementation in order to ensure greater participation of the communities involved in this process. This also requires that work guidelines and procedures be improved, and public managers and community organizations be trained so there is better governance.

One promising practice has been the establishment of civil society networks engaged in sustainable development programs in the municipalities. These networks encourage local authorities to commit to a set of goals, leading to a more qualified public debate.

Fostering civil society engagement

Even though governments play a crucial role in complying with the new agenda, private initiatives and an organized civil society are both determining factors. That is why we need to foster social mobilization around the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), like the successful actions taken when promoting the

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The formation of networks or platforms dedicated to the theme, advertisements for simplifying and publicizing the SDGs, the creation of observatories that assess local indicators, the intensive use of communications technology and social media, the incentive for volunteerism, and the establishment of partnerships aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are just some of the good practices that can be updated.

As far as historically marginalized groups are concerned, it is important to adopt instruments that enable the examination of the consequences of racism and other forms of discrimination for the new goals, and propose actions to end this inequality. In this sense, greater articulation between the 2030 Agenda and the Durban process may help.

The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, signed in 2001 in South Africa during the World Conference against Racism, presents many action strategies, like the International Decade for People of African Descent, that began in 2015.

Strengthening education for Planetary Citizenship

Despite the fact that access to education has increased over the last few decades, the quality of the education offered needs to be improved, as foreseen in the fourth SDG. This requires not only that institutions, networks, and educational communities be strengthened, but also a reflection be made about the content that is prioritized when school syllabuses are devised.

The 66th United Nations Department of Public Information/NGO (DPI/NGO) Conference, held in Gyeongju in Republic of Korea, made an important contribution to achieving this purpose when it discussed "Education for Global Citizenship: Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals Together". According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), "global citizens are individuals who think and act for a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world".

We, from the Legion of Good Will, work directly for the promotion of Global Citizenship, through formal education (basic education schools), and through informal education (social service centres and homes for the elderly). In the fields of advocacy and public information, we produce multimedia content about citizenship (broadcast on radio, TV, websites, and in publications) and social marketing. We hold and participate in congresses on various social topics. We train and advise NGOs that work with the SDGs targeted populations, among other actions.

We, therefore, cover all age groups and a wide range of regions, races, and religious groups, in addition to assisting people with disabilities. Our experience enables us to formulate the following proposals as our contribution to the debate on education for Global Citizenship:

Interdisciplinary programs

We believe that education should not be provided in a fragmented way. We understand that the knowledge imparted to students should not just be a reproduction of the teaching content that has been historically accumulated and organized in the curriculum. We recognize the importance of teaching and learning

about the legacy of previous generations (in science, the arts, languages, etc.). Nevertheless, we also believe that we need to create favourable conditions for students to reflect on the legacy that their own generation will leave.

We believe it is important to learn math equations, theories, languages, cultural movements, and ecosystems, but this is not the only purpose of the teaching-learning process. Implied in each subject are its political and social uses. To understand these uses, it is necessary to re-build the bridges between areas of knowledge. In other words, it is not enough just to study the atom, for instance; we need to understand the scientific revolution caused by the advances of this knowledge, to observe its use for military purposes and for generating power, and to grasp the social and environmental implications that persist until today for the people who suffered the impact of these advances. Biology, Physics, History, Sociology, and the Arts are not private universes isolated from one another, but different perspectives of investigation, in-depth analysis, and understanding of the same world, the same Humanity.

That is why in our schools, we apply the Pedagogy of Affection and the Ecumenical Citizen Pedagogy, innovative teaching proposal created by Paiva Netto. There is not a particular class or an isolated moment when not to "work with values" and to debate solidarity, justice, respect, or sustainability. All the school subjects have a shared responsibility for ensuring that these values permeate all the content taught.

The themed programs we develop are organized by age span or by academic grades, respecting the needs, interests, and reality of the children, adolescents, young people, adults, and the elderly. In each of the subjects in our teaching network, the theme axes of Ecumenical Spirituality is applied in such a way that it communicates with the regular syllabus in an interdisciplinary way, thus, contributing towards giving a new meaning to and expanding intellectual content.

Ecumenical Spirituality — "A view beyond the intellect"

Ecumenical Spirituality is the basis of our social and educational work. We use the term "ecumenical" in its all-encompassing etymological meaning, "of worldwide scope or application; universal"; in other words, not restricted to the interfaith dimension, which is fundamentally important. Therefore, applying in the syllabus content "a view beyond the intellect" as educator Paiva Netto says, is not teaching students by means of a doctrinaire school textbook, or imposing a particular idea of God. It is about acknowledging and valuing spiritual wisdom, the millennial wisdom of our ancestors, which is part of the various different cultures and communities.

The importance of spiritual wisdom resides in fostering the awareness of the fact that the consequences of human actions are not those that just have an immediate impact. Reflecting on what we build in the present and its ramifications for the future, even if it is after our death, helps increase the responsibility that each one of us has for future generations. A sense of eternity may help us see further by provoking reflections such as: "What will be perpetually remembered about me from the attitudes I adopt in the community where I live?" and "What marks, the legacy that I am leaving in the world, or as various religious and spiritual traditions teach, I may be carrying with me?"

It is our understanding that considering the eternity of life in other dimensions, or even the continuous effect of our actions on material reality (the environmental impact we generate or the good results we leave as a legacy in our community), makes an effective contribution for adopting a sustainable posture that is necessary for the exercise of citizenship. In his book É Urgente Reeducar! [It is Urgent to Re-educate], the creator of the Pedagogy of Affection and the Ecumenical Citizen Pedagogy, defines Ecumenical Spirituality as: "The cradle of the most generous values that are born of the Soul, the dwelling of the emotions and of the reasoning enlightened by intuition, the atmosphere that embraces everything that transcends the ordinary field of matter and comes from the elevated human sensitivity, such as Truth, Justice, Mercy, Ethics, Honesty, Generosity, and Fraternal Love. In short, the mathematical constant that harmonizes the equation of human, mental, moral, and spiritual existence...Now, without the knowledge that we exist on two planes, therefore not only on the physical plane, it is difficult to achieve a truly Solidarity-centred Society, because we shall continue to ignore the fact that knowledge of Superior Spirituality raises the character of creatures and, consequently, directs it towards constructing Planetary Citizenship."

Conclusion

Educating with Ecumenical Spirituality for Planetary or Global Citizenship is enriching education by reflecting on death, the meaning of life, charity, self-knowledge, and other universal values, based on an interdisciplinary perspective in which human, biological, and exact sciences add to the knowledge of students, their families, and the community. It means also applying dialogue about social, ethical, political, and philosophical implications to the teaching content.

We place ourselves at your disposal and shall be pleased to share our teaching proposal and its methodology with all those who believe in education as the way to Global Citizenship, which we also call Ecumenical Citizenship, as defined by educator Paiva Netto in a recent message to the international delegations present at one of the various UN debates:

"Important steps have been taken and achieved, but there is still a lot to be done before we can experience the citizenship granted to us by life in community, a global solidarity community, which I call Ecumenical Citizenship. And our tool for building the Ecumenical Citizen is something we cannot lose sight of: the universalistic spirit, whose instrument is Solidarity, enlightening minds and feelings. The Ecumenical Citizen is one who does not waste time on intolerant conflicts with others — just because they do not share the same social, political, and/or religious thinking, or do not belong to the same culture or race — but one who joins forces with others to reduce the overwhelming need that affects communities, the masses, or a single individual."